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## THE 1917 TRANSLATION OF THE SWEDISH BIBLE

De kanoniska böckerna. Översättningen gillad och stadfäst av Konungen år 1917.

This translation of the Swedish Bible, appearing in the anniversary year of the Reformation, represents in a way the culmination of the labors of the Royal Bible Commission during nearly a century and a half.

The history of Bible translation in Sweden goes back to the first half of the 14th century; some parts of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation had been translated before 1520 when the Reformation in Sweden began. The important version of the New Testament which appeared in 1526 was made by Laurentius Andreä and Olaus Petri after Erasmus' Greek text and Luther's German version. Parts of the O. T. appeared in 1536 and were followed in 1541 by the whole Bible of Gustavus I. Vasa. The O. T. in this version was the work of Archbishop Laurentius Petri, with the assistance of the two translators mentioned above, and followed Luther's Bible of 1534.

As early as 1600 Gustavus Vasa's son, Carl IX, appointed a translation committee of four members. Gustavus Adolphus did likewise, but the results were inconsiderable. Under later rulers several cautiously revised editions appeared; probably the most important one of these was Carl XII's Bible of 1703, which became the commonly accepted version in Swedish churches ("*vår gamla kirkobibel*") previous to the revisions of the last forty years. It differs only slightly from the first complete Bible of 1541. One might compare its popularity with that of the King James ("Authorized") version in English. It is, of course, still circulated, printed in Gothic ("German") type in an old orthography, with the text slightly modernized.

The work of the Royal Bible Commission began in 1773 under Gustavus III.<sup>1</sup> A specimen translation was made by

<sup>1</sup> For the following outline of the work of the Commission I am indebted to the scholarly articles of Dr. S. G. Youngert of Rock Island, in the *Augustana Theol. Quarterly*, vol. 10 (1908), 129ff., and in the weekly *Augustana* for Feb. 27, 1913; also to Hauck's *Realencyklopädie für protestant. Theologie*, 10, p. 150 f.

1793, but being a rather rationalistic, exegetical paraphrase, it was not accepted. A partially new commission was now formed and in 1816 a new tentative translation of the N. T. was issued, but it too was rejected. Part of the O. T. was done by the same commission, and still other parts by 1837 which may be called the end of the first period of the Commission's activity. In 1841, the three hundredth anniversary of the complete Swedish Bible, the Commission was reorganized. Another trial version of the N. T. appeared in 1853, somewhat revised in 1861. This revision was sent back to the Commission by the Council or Conference of the Swedish Church in 1868. The work was continued with zeal and a new tentative translation of the N. T. was submitted to the Church in 1873. It was based upon Tischendorf's Greek text and was the most radical effort to modernize the Swedish N. T. before the translation of 1907-17. But it encountered opposition and was referred back to the Commission. Another trial version of the N. T., prepared along more conservative lines, was presented five years later (Council of 1878). The O. T. too was worked over again by this time (a thorough revision of a preliminary version of 1868). But the Swedish Church declined (1878) to accept the new version. The work was printed, however, and widely circulated. The O. T. of 1878 was, in fact, the only modern version in common use (bound with the N. T. of 1883) until the appearance of the new one of 1903 (*Normalupplagan*).

After 1878 the Commission took up the N. T. once more and the resulting version was recommended by the Church Council of 1883 and by the King for use "vid undervisningen i kyrka och skola." This 1883 version of the N. T. (*Normalupplagan*, "Nya översättningen") was accordingly the official revision in Sweden until the latest translation was approved and it is, I believe, still the preferred revision in the Swedish churches of America. The N. T. thus disposed of in 1883 for the time being, the Commission proceeded again to the revision of the O. T. A version was elaborated with little regard to the translation of 1878. Their work was published in 1893-98. The Council of 1898 praised this O. T., but directed the Commission to continue revising it. The Council of 1903 then recommended the O. T.,

as presented that year, to the same extent as the N. T. of 1883. Thus from 1904 on the "Normalupplaga" of the whole Bible was in circulation (O. T. 1903, N. T. 1883).<sup>2</sup>

But the O. T. was now a more modern revision than the N. T. The next step was to make a translation of the N. T. to harmonize better with the latest O. T. Such a new translation of the N. T. (not a revision of the 1883 version) was brought out in 1907, the work of the same translators who prepared the O. T. of four years previously. The Church Council of 1908 declared this N. T. was an admirable piece of work, but in many passages it was too much of a paraphrase, the style, too, was capable of improvement, etc. In other quarters something of an uproar was made about it. A petition signed by five hundred Swedish ministers found fault with it.<sup>3</sup> It was felt that the Commission was too far removed from the people, hence an advisory committee of five, three of whom were churchmen, was appointed to confer with the Royal Bible Commission. One of these men was J. A. Edman, who had published an excellent independent Swedish translation of the N. T. in 1900. The 1907 N. T. was accordingly worked over and made ready in 1912 for presentation to the Church Council which acted upon it favorably.<sup>4</sup> Much of the objection to the N. T. version of 1907 and '12 came from readers who felt that the Commission should merely bring the N. T. of 1883 up to date and not make a new translation. All previous Swedish versions (except 1873) had been based upon younger but longer Greek sources; the

<sup>2</sup> This edition of the Swedish Bible is also distributed by the American Bible Soc., N. Y. (as "Swedish Nos. 12-17" in their catalog). On the O. T. of 1903 see the article by C. A. Blomgren in *Augustana Theol. Quarterly*, 10 (1908), pp. 8-20.

<sup>3</sup> V. Rudin: "Svaromål på petitionen om Bibelkommissionens nyaste översättning" (six articles in *Stockholms Dagblad*, also separate, 1908); J. Personne: "Bibelkommissionens principer vid 1907 års översättning av Nya testamentet," in *Bibelforskaren*, Uppsala, vol. 25 (1908), 1-16; see also the excellent article by Dr. S. G. Youngert, in *Augustana Theol. Quarterly*, 10, 129 ff. on the N. T. of 1907.

<sup>4</sup> There is a series of very carefully prepared articles by Dr. S. G. Youngert on the N. T. of 1912 in the weekly *Augustana* (Rock Island, Illinois), 1913 (Feb. 27, March 13 and 27, April 10), which the reviewer has found very useful for the 1917 edition.

N. T. of 1907 and '12 was mainly a translation of the Greek N.T. of the German, Edward Nestle,<sup>5</sup> itself based upon Tischendorf and Westcott and Hort, hence following the two oldest Greek codices (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus). When the Commission thus went back to older but shorter Greek sources than those which had previously been used for accepted Swedish versions of the N. T., many readers rebelled at the omissions and changes; they preferred the popular "normal" revision of 1883 or the N. T. of the "old Church-Bible." Serious objection was not made, so far as I know, to the O. T. revision of 1903, made on the same principles as the N. T. of 1907 and '12. That was because the O. T. text is fixed in the Massoretic Hebrew version. But the case was different with the N. T., for some 2000 MSS. are preserved and they all differ from one another, sometimes very considerably. In going back to the older and shorter MSS. the Swedish Bible Commission was scarcely more radical than the committees who revised the English Bible (1881, 1885; and the "American Standard Version").

It seems that the O. T. of 1903 and the N. T. of 1907 and '12 were again referred to the Commission for certain changes. The final result is the new Bible of 1917. It has the approval of the Swedish Church, confirmed by the ultimate authority, the King. It accordingly replaces officially all other published translations, though of course congregations are not forced to use it.

As to whether the work of revision will rest at this point for many years, the reviewer has no information. The appearances are that it will. Yet work of that sort is really never done. One feels that in all of the principal languages there should be a Bible version with literary merit (e. g. the King James version in English, and Luther's German Bible) for general use, conservative readers, etc., which might need no revision for a century or more; there should also be another translation, revised say every ten years, for readers with scholarly interests who wish

<sup>5</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Stuttgart, Württembergische Bibelanstalt; also re-edited in 1904 for the British and Foreign Bible Soc. (the Am. Bible Soc., N. Y., is the American distributor of the special edition of this scholarly and very cheap Greek N. T.).

to keep in touch with the work done on the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

The 1917 version prints poetical passages as verse. The orthography is, of course, modern (*v* for voiced *f*, *fv*; omits the old initial *h* before *v*, etc.). The aim was to use natural modern Swedish; that includes a matter like word-order, e.g. Ps. 1, 3, Old Bible: *såsom ett trä . . . hwilket frukt bär i sinom tid; och dess löf förfalna intet*; 1917: *såsom ett träd . . . vilket bär sin frukt i sin tid, och vars löv icke vissna*. Long periods are broken up as far as possible; this sometimes involves introducing particles and such expressions as "han vet," "att bevisa," "ty jag önskar," "jag menar," "vill jag," etc., which are not actually represented in the originals. In the following some passages from the two parts of the 1917 translation are given, together with the reading of one or two older versions for the sake of comparison.<sup>6</sup>

*The Old Testament, 1917.* The revisers point out that, although the Hebrew text used by Luther practically coincides with that followed by Bible translators of the twentieth century, the original is now much better understood. This patent fact explains many variations of the modern Swedish translations from the "old Church-Bible" of 1703, e.g. Gen. 30, 37, Old Bible: *Men Jacob tog gröna aspekäppar, hassel och castaneen, och barkade hwita ränder deruppå*; 1878: *Och J. tog sig käpar af frisk poppel, mandelträd och lönn och randade på dem hvita ränder, derigenom att han blottade det hvita på käpparne*; 1917: *men J. tog sig friska käppar av poppel, mandelträd och lönn och skalade på dem vita ränder, i det han blottade det vita på käpparna*.

The following passages taken at random bring out various differences between the old version and the recent ones.

Gen. 1, 11, Old Bible: *Bäre jorden gräs och örter, som frö hafwa, och fruktsam trä, att hwart och ett bär frukt efter sin art, och hafwer sitt eget frö i sig sjelwo på jordene*, 1917: *Frambringe jorden grönska, fröbärande örter och fruktträd, som efter sina arter bära frukt, vari de hava sitt frö, på jorden*.

<sup>6</sup> My quotations from the "old Church-Bible" are from a modern reprint, not accurately representing the version of 1703.

Gen. 1, 16, (Old): Och Gud gjorde tu stor ljus; ett stort ljus, som regerade dagen, och ett litet ljus, som regerade natten; och stjernor. 1917: *Gud gjorde de två stora ljusen, det större ljuset till att råda över dagen, och det mindre ljuset till att råda över natten, så ock stjärnorna.*

Gen. 24, 62, (Old): Men Isaac kom ifrå den brunnen, som kallades dens lefwandes och seendes; ty han bodde i det landet södernt. 1878: Och Isak var på väg hem ifrån brunnen Lachajroi, och han bodde i sydlandet. 1917: *Men Isak var på väg hem från Beer-Lahai Roi, ty han bodde i Sydlandet.*

Ex. 20, 5, (Old): Bed icke till dem, och tjena dem icke; ty jag HERren din Gud, är en stark hämnare, den som söker fädernas missgerning, inpå barnen, allt intill tredje och fjerde led, de som mig hata. 1878: Sådana skall du icke tillbedja och icke dyrka; ty jag Herren, din Gud, är en nitälskande Gud, som hemsöker fädernas missgerning på barnen i tredje och fjerde led, på dem som mig hata. 1917: *Du skall icke tillbedja sådana ej heller tjäna dem; ty jag, Herren, din Gud, är en nitälskande Gud, som hemsöker fädernas missgärning på barn och efterkommande i tredje och fjärde led, när man hatar mig.*

Ps. 23, 2, (Old): Han föder mig på en grön äng, och förer mig till friskt vatten. 1878: Han låter mig hvila på gröna ängar, han förer mig til lugna vatten. 1917: *han låter mig vila på gröna ängar; han för mig till vatten där jag finner ro.*

Ps. 42, 6. (Old): . . . ty jag skall ännu tacka honom, att han hjälper mig med sitt ansigte. 1878: . . . ty jag skall ännu en gång tacka honom, min frälsning och min Gud. 1917: *. . . ty jag skall åter få tacka honom för frälsning genom honom.*

Is. 11, 1, (Old): Och ett Ris skall uppgå utaf Isai slägte, och en Telning utaf hans rot frukt bära. 1878: Och ett skott skall utgå ifrån Isais stam och en telning uppspira ifrån hans rötter. 1917: *Men ett skott skall skjuta upp ur Isais avhuggna stam, och en telning från dess rötter skall bära frukt.*

*The New Testament, 1917.* Here too the revisers compared and used preceding versions. These included the unofficial translations of Myrberg, Waldenström, and Edman; also the Swedish Catholic version of J. P. E. Benelius, made in 1895 (of course from the Vulgate) was not ignored.

Since the shorter Greek text was used, numerous passages in older versions do not appear in the 1917 translation. The revisers call attention (under "Nya testamentets text" in the Appendix of the edition used by the reviewer) to the omission of a number of verses, because the same passages occur in a more suitable context in other parts of the N. T.; e. g. Matth. 18, 11 was left out, since the best evidence is in favor of its presence in Luke 19, 10. Where verses are omitted the verse number is still printed, with a footnote referring to the Appendix which indicates where these verses may be found in the N. T.

Other passages disappeared entirely. In Matth. 6, 13 the closing words of the old version of the Lord's prayer, "Ty riket är ditt, och magten, och härligheten, i evighet" are omitted, as they are in modern versions in other languages. Otherwise the older language of the prayer (as in the N. T. of 1883, not just as in the old Church-Bible) is kept in the 1917 version, but in the Appendix a thoroughly modern translation of the Lord's prayer is given, both according to Matthew and to Luke.

Some other omissions are (1) the end of Matth. 19, 9 (1883: . . . och den som tager en frånskild till hustru, han gör hor); (2) the second half of Mark 6, 11; (3) in the Ave Maria the words: välsignad är du ibland qvinnor (Luke 1, 28) do not appear; (4) Luke 9, 56 the words of 1883: Ty menniskosonen har icke kommit för att förderfva själar, utan att frälsa dem; (5) 1 Cor. 11, 24. 1883: . . . Tagen, äten. Detta är min lekamen, som brytes för eder . . . . In 1917 "Tagen, äten" is omitted and "brytes" is changed to "*varder utgiven*"; (6) Luke 11, 11, 1883: Och hvilken bland eder är den fader, som, om hans son beder honom om ett bröd, gifver honom en sten? Eller ock om han beder om en fisk icke gifver han väl honom en orm i stället för en fisk? 1917 omits much of this and reads: *Finnes bland eder någon fader, som när hans son beder honom om en fisk, i stället för en fisk räcker honom en orm?*

Two important passages are put in brackets (also bracketed or set off in the English and American revised versions): the close of the last chapter of Mark (verses 9-20) and the story of the adulteress taken in sin, John 7, 53 to 8, 11. In the first



draft of the new Swedish translation in 1907 the latter passage was put in fine print at the bottom of the page like a footnote but this procedure met with considerable objection.

On the other hand the 1917 version introduces some words in Matth. 10, 23 which are lacking in all translations the reviewer has compared, whether Swedish or not. After *När de förfölja eder i en stad, så flyn till en annan*, 1917 adds: *och om de också där förfölja eder, så flyn till ännu en annan*. This is one of the "noteworthy rejected readings" of the English scholars.

In other cases the new version exhibits considerably more conservatism. Where good MSS. differ the translators usually preferred to follow the reading which appeared in the old Swedish Bible. Again, in the last chapter of Luke, for instance, some good MSS. lack a number of passages which have all been retained in the 1917 version.

The attempt to give smoother and more natural modern Swedish is everywhere evident, e. g. Matth. 9, 2, Old Bible: Och si de hade in för honom en lam, som låg uti en säng; 1883: Och se, de förde till honom en lam, som låg på en säng; 1917: *Då förde de till honom en lam man* (etc. like 1883). The older translations with "Och se" followed the Greek too literally. But changes of this sort brought the Commission a good deal of criticism. Compare also the following: (1) Coloss. 1, 22 (Old Bible): med sins köotts lekamen, 1883: i hans köotts kropp; 1917: *i hans jordiska kropp*. (2) Mark 8, 33 (Old): Gack bort ifrå mig, du Satan; 1883: Gå bort ur min åsyn, Satan; 1917: *Gå bort, Satan, och stå mig icke i vägen*. (3) Jude, verse 7, 1883: Sodom and Gomorra) gingo efter främmande kött; 1917: *stodo efter annat umgänge än det naturliga*. (4) John 13, 10 (Old): . . . men han är all ren; 1917: . . . *han är ju i övrigt hel och hållen, ren*.

Some of the latter quotations lead us to the matter of free paraphrases, to which serious objections had been made in the 1907 and 1912 drafts of the new translation.

Mk. 6, 31, 1883: Ty de kommande och gående voro många, så att de icke ens hade tid till att äta; 1917: *Ty de fingo icke ens tid att äta; så många voro de som kommo och gingo*.

Mk. 10, 38, 1883: Döpas med det dop, hvarmed jag döpas;  
1917: *genomgå det dop som jag genomgår.*

1 Thess. 5, 3, 1883: Det är frid och säkerhet,—this is a plain and direct rendering of the Greek, but 1917 has: *Allt står väl till, och ingen fara är på färde.*

Wherever the word *helvete* occurred in older Swedish versions it was changed either to *Gehenna* (following the lead of the unofficial translations of Myrberg, Edman and Waldenström), or to *dödsriket* (when it represented "Hades" in the original). This toning down of the idea of hell in the new translation encountered some earnest opposition. Since "*Gehenna*," for instance, would doubtless have an unfamiliar sound to many Swedish ears, the Appendix contains a full, up-to-date explanation of the word; also of "*dödsriket*."

Instead of the old expression "*sitta till bords*" the 1917 N. T. has "*ligga till bords*," since in ancient times the custom of reclining at meals was current in Palestine just as it was among the Romans at home.

Dr. S. G. Youngert pointed out a passage of the new translation in which *tu* occurred twice in previous versions but has been changed to *två* in only one of the two cases, Matth. 19, 5, 6, (Mark 10, 8): 1917: Och de *tu* skola varda ett kött. Så äro de icke mer *två*, utan ett kött. It is not clear why "*de tu*" should be retained here (and in 1. Cor. 6, 16; Ephes. 5, 20) when even the old Church-Bible has "*Hwilken af de två*" in Matth. 21, 31.

The 1917 Bible has appeared or is appearing in many editions. Perhaps the most convenient one would be the 8° edition published by Norstedt (1353 and 442 pp., priced in 1917 at 6.50 kr. in cloth). The same publisher has a pulpit edition, 4°, at 140 kr., and is getting out a somewhat smaller 4° edition in parts. The Bibelförlag, Stockholm, is also issuing a 4° edition in parts, while the Nordisk Familjeboksförlag, Stockholm, has begun the publication of a folio edition as "*Gustav V:s Kirko-bibel*." The edition examined by the reviewer is, "*De förenade Bibelsällskapens edition*," published by the Sv. Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag in Stockholm, 1918, (in cloth and leather at various prices, originally 4-10 kr.). The type in this edition is not too small but, at least in the cheaper editions,

not everywhere sharp and clear (due to war quality of paper and ink?). Each verse is here set off by itself (rather strange in a modern Bible, but no doubt a concession to the general reader), and references are printed in finer type at the end of the verses they belong with,—this is often very disturbing especially in the poetical books where the lines are much broken up anyway. This edition (I am not sure about those of other publishers) contains a carefully prepared Appendix “Ordförklaringar och sakupplysningar” (already referred to), a table of weights and measures, the texts of the Church year, and maps.

It is no doubt too early to say how successful the 1917 translation will be with Bible readers. It has the official sanction of the Church of Sweden, and the interest is now great, because of the novelty of the work. No translation can suit everybody; it may be that the objections to the present version are not so great as those which were made at first to the King James Bible. This translation will not do for Swedish what the King James Bible did for English; it is too late to expect that—Swedish does not need a new Bible version as a model for good style. There is no doubt still a considerable number of passages in this work which could be bettered, either in style<sup>7</sup> or as translations. On the whole this is a conscientiously prepared, easily intelligible, modern translation, neither too radical nor too conservative, and the Swedish people are to be congratulated upon its possession. It is a work that will be carefully studied by translators and revisers of the Bible in other tongues for a long time to come.

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<sup>7</sup> Under the heading of “Den nya Bibelsvenskan” G. Cederschiöld, in *Språk och Stil*, vol. 19 (1919), pp. 1-27, gives 25 pages of roughly classified quotations showing differences in the language of the Old Bible (1703) and the 1917 translation. The article contains on pp. 19-21 lists of passages in the new version which might have been improved or in which the reasons for changes in the 1917 translation are not clear.